Local Development and Child Themes

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Local Development
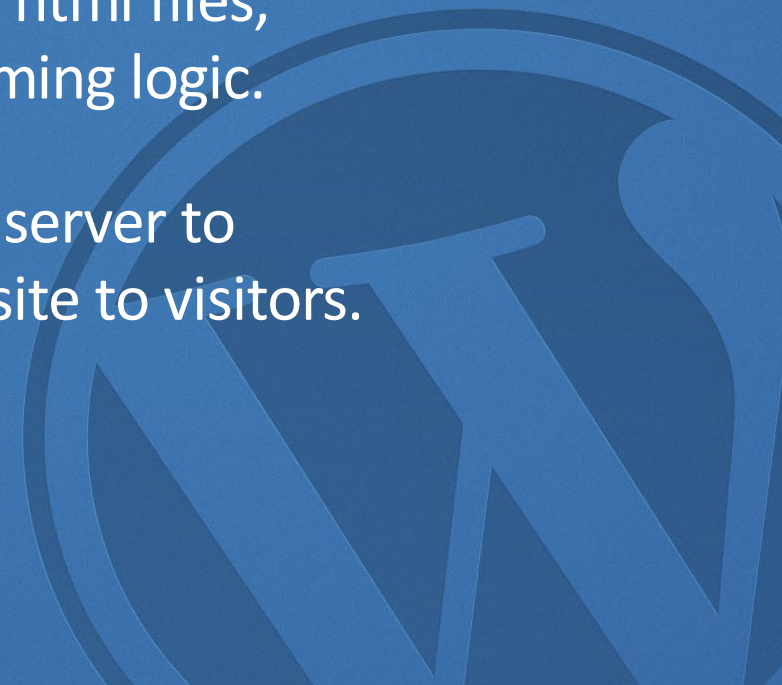# What, Why and How?

Local Development
What?

Websites exist on computers called servers. Their job is to listen to requests from browsers on other computers an 'serve' up the webpages. They build these webpages by generating html files, which may require making database calls and performing logic.

When you buy hosting you are paying for space on a server to store your files. This servers job is to serve your website to visitors.
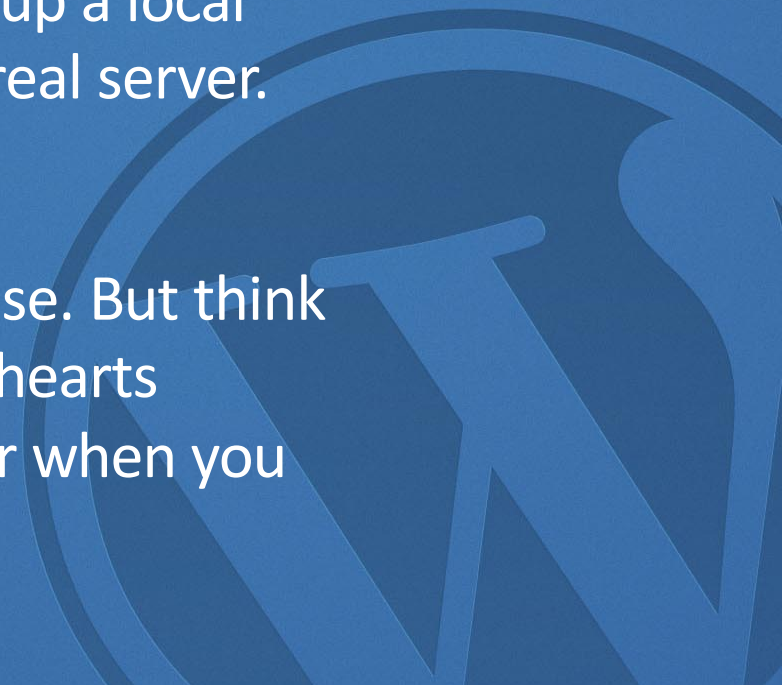
Local Development What?

Local development is where you store all these files on your own computer and setup a local server so you can view your site without going on the internet. You do this by setting up a local environment which mimics the environment on the real server. You also setup your own database server.

Your local website will not be accessible to anyone else. But think of it as a sandpit where you can play around to your hearts content and only deploy your changes to a live server when you are happy
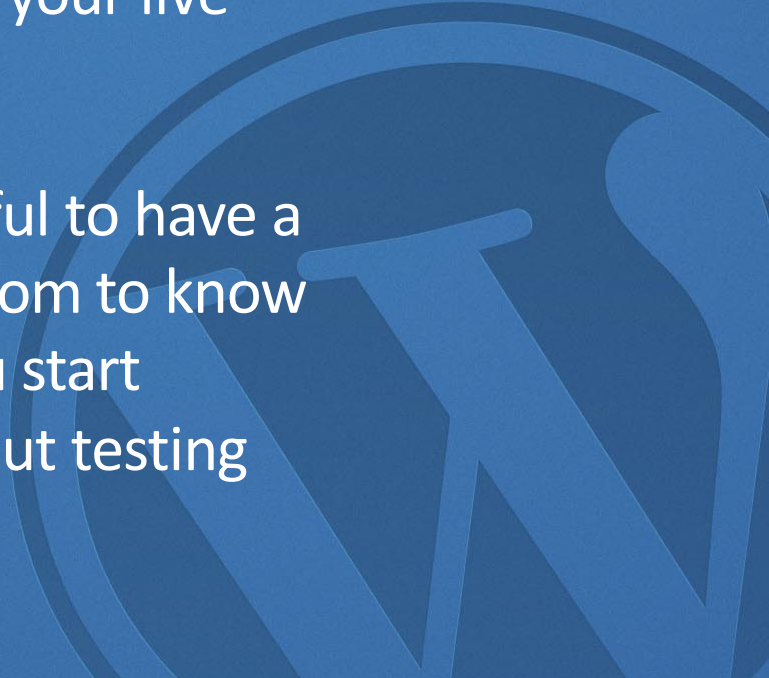
Local Development
Why?

Developing locally provides you with a safe space where you can freely try out new themes and plugins and test them safe in the knowledge that any changes you make will not affect your live site.

Even if you don't intend to do any coding it's still useful to have a space where you can muck around. You get the freedom to know you cannot "break" anything, which you can do if you start installing new themes and plugins on a live site without testing them first.

Local Development Why?

It also provides a space where you can update themes, plugins and WordPress core safely. If anything breaks you know before you do it on your live site!

If you are interested in starting to code, or even make a few minor changes to the look of your site then local development lets you try thinks out safely and is a great way to learn how WordPress works.

Local Development
Why?

The alternative - directly altering files on a server, perhaps via FTP, is very dangerous. You can easily break your site, including making it impossible to log in if you do not know what you are doing.

You will also likely be able to develop faster since all the files are being served from your computer.

Local Development
How?

Fortunately developing locally is also super easy! There are many programs out there that make the process a doddle.
These include:

- WAMP / MAMP / XAMPP
- Desktop Server
- Vagrant
- Local by Flywheel

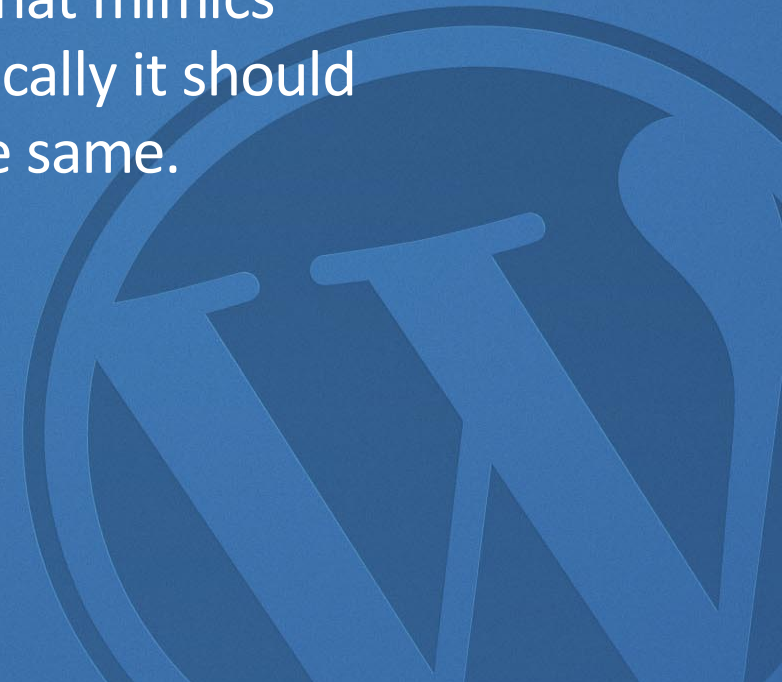The one we shall be using Local by Flywheel.

Demo installing Local by Flywheel

Local Development Notes

Local by Flywheel installs a "virtual machine" on your computer. Don't worry about the technical details! All this means is that you create a virtual computer inside your own machine that mimics the live server. This should mean if your site works locally it should work on your live site since the environments are the same.

Local Development
Techie stuff

As mentioned before Local creates a virtual machine. It also uses Docker behind the scenes. This means you can change the environment on the virtual machine without it affecting your global environment. The benefit of this is you can create an environment that is very similar to the one on your live site.

For example you might have two live sites. One is an apache server running php 5 the other is on a Nginx running PHP 7. A plugin that uses the latest features of PHP 7 won't work on the PHP 5 server. But on Local we can setup two virtual computers each one mimicking the features of our live server.

Different themes in WordPress

- Starter theme or parent theme?
- Starter themes – Underscores, Sage, FoundationPress, JointsWP, Bones, Understrap, and others
- Parent themes – TwentySeventeen, and most of other themes on the WordPress repo

What is a child theme?

- Specially registered theme that inherit most properties from its parent theme

Why do we need a child theme?

- We have a lovely theme we spent ages customising
- Our theme needs an update
- Should I do it?
- What if I don't!
- But what if I do?

Child theme setup

- Create a new folder in wp-content/themes
- style.css
- functions.php
- my_theme_enqueue_styles(){}
- add_action('wp_enqueue_scripts', 'my_theme_enqueue_styles')
- Activate in the dashboard

Child theme demo

Child theme setup
the easy way

- Download a plugin
- Child-theme configurator by Lilaea Media

Let's go wild!

... and customize our child theme

Thank you